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RUEHAN/AMEMBASSY ANTANANARIVO 0794  
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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 PORT LOUIS 000028

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR EB/TPP/ABT, OES/PCI, AND AF/E  
DEPT PASS EB/TPP/MTAA/ABT - MSZYMANSKI, JBOBO  
USDA FAS FOR OSTA/NTPMB - FNAIM, EPORTER, MCHESLEY  
USDA FAS FOR OCBD - KSKUPNIK, JMAURER, MMOORE, DEVANS  
USDA FAS FOR OCRA - KMCKINNELL, AFERRUS  
PRETORIA FOR USDA/FAS SCOTT SINDELAR

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [EAGR](#) [ECON](#) [ETRD](#) [KPAO](#) [PREL](#) [SENV](#) [TBIO](#) [MP](#)

SUBJECT: PORT LOUIS' PROPOSAL FOR BIOTECHNOLOGY FUNDS

REF: A) STATE129940 B) PRETORIA 002513

¶1. Summary: Embassy Port Louis requests funding from the FY 2009 Biotechnology Outreach Strategy Fund to provide a basic biotechnology, biosafety, and food safety introduction to Mauritian officials and other stakeholders. This proposal was developed by FAS/Pretoria in coordination with Embassy Port Louis' ECON and PA Sections. We also considered Government of Mauritius and NGO representatives input to establish this proposal. End Summary.

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Regional Background  
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¶2. Over the past four years, using funding from State/EEB and USDA, FAS/Pretoria has developed relationships with key partners in Southern Africa, the United States, and international organizations to address regulatory and public acceptance issues pertaining to biotechnology. As these relationships have developed, trust and respect has also grown between the USG and the biotech industry, public and private. To continue to build on these relationships, FAS/Pretoria is requesting funding again this year to bring U.S. experts to engage the local industry and stakeholders in discussions on topics such as labeling, risk assessments, management of field trials, and regional harmonization.

¶3. Misinformation and misperceptions about biotechnology threaten the acceptance of U.S. agricultural and food products derived from biotechnology in Southern Africa and threaten U.S. producers' access to international markets. United States' exports to the largest markets in the region (South Africa, Mauritius, Madagascar, and Mozambique) grew over 30 percent from 2007 to 2008, due to increases in exports of intermediate and consumer oriented agricultural goods, such as vegetable oils and prepared sauces and cereals. It is expected U.S. exports to these markets will continue to increase in 2009 and beyond as consumer demand increases and these countries begin to diversify their suppliers to include the United States. USDA cooperators' interest in conducting activities in these markets is also on the rise, leading to increased interest in the United States as a supplier.

¶4. Several key countries in Sub-Saharan Africa have passed biosafety legislation in the past year, or are in the process of formulating their policies and have requested help from USDA. These countries include South Africa, Mozambique, Madagascar, and Mauritius. All have drafted biosafety policies and are currently working on implementation procedures. These countries are

pro-biotech, but admittedly lack the necessary understanding of many aspects of biotech and genetic engineering. There is a significant need for training on implementation procedures, characteristics of efficient regulatory frameworks, producer and consumer awareness strategies, et al.

15. The lack of basic understanding of agricultural biotechnology among consumers, members of the media and political decision-makers is a critical impediment to a rational, pragmatic acceptance of the technology. The African public remains easily persuaded by misinformation regarding the basic risks, benefits, and regulatory approaches to best evaluate the benefits of adopting agricultural biotechnology. Biosafety committees in the region remain inactive or unsure where to focus their attention due to a lack of understanding of the benefits of biotechnology. Due to this lack of activity, science-based information in the regulatory decision-making process is minimal and opponents of biotechnology are the most vocal, which could be reflected in new regulations concerning GMOs.

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Situation in Mauritius  
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16. The Government of Mauritius (GOM) has requested assistance from Embassy Port Louis and FAS/Pretoria in developing functioning biosafety regulations, including food safety regulations, based on sound science.

17. Mauritius, a small island economy, has always been a net food importing country. Food imports currently accounts for USD 692

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million, equivalent to 18 percent of Mauritius' total import bill. The major items imported include rice, wheat, flour, pulses, edible oil, meat, and dairy products. The bulk of the corn and soybean used as raw materials by the livestock feed factories are also imported.

18. Since only 30 percent of domestic food demand is produced locally, Mauritius is looking towards biotechnology to improve productivity and reduce reliance on imports. It is doubtful that domestic production will ever reach high enough levels to fully satisfy domestic food demand, and Mauritius will still rely on imports to fill the gap and will need to develop regulations that deal with GMOs in imported foods, since major suppliers, such as South Africa, India, and the United States, produce GMOs.

19. Mauritius buys 140,000 metric tons of wheat annually mainly from France (60 percent) and Australia (40 percent). In 2007, Mauritius began diversifying wheat imports and imported more than USD 12 million of wheat from the United States. While there are no approved GMO traits in wheat in the United States currently, that may change in the near future. Given this, functioning biosafety policies and regulations in Mauritius would ensure the United States maintains its market share in Mauritian wheat into the future as new products are developed.

110. In January 2009, the Minister of Agro Industry, Food Production and Security announced his Strategic Plan on Food Security 2008-2011, a roadmap which indicates the way forward to increase food production both locally and within the region. A Food Security Fund of USD 32 million has been provided in the GOM 2008-09 Budget for the implementation of the strategic plan. The strategy includes a proposed Regional Food Company (RFC), which will take the form of a public-private sector partnership company that will seek capital to develop crop and livestock production in nearby countries, primarily Madagascar and Mozambique. The GOM has already secured 5,000 hectares of land from Mozambique and negotiations with Madagascar are ongoing. Initially, the RFC will develop potato, and other vegetable production, moving into corn, soybean, rice, pulses and eventually livestock/meat.

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Activity  
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¶11. To provide the GOM and stakeholders the necessary information and guidance to develop properly functioning biosafety policies, based on sound-science, Post requests funding to bring two experts to Mauritius to engage local officials and stakeholders on relevant issues to include adventitious presence, risk assessments, labeling, and regional harmonization.

¶12. The experts would travel to Mauritius for up to ten days to engage with GOM representatives and other stakeholders in meetings, workshops, and conferences, as well as field visits.

¶13. Post proposes to hold special meetings for media contacts specifically associated with the agricultural and biotechnology sectors to discuss biotechnology regulations and developments in the United States. Additionally, PA will arrange press opportunities for the visiting experts to engage journalists that cover agriculture, agribusiness and biotechnology issues. These could include roundtables with print media, one-on-one interviews, and radio call-in programs.

¶14. Length of Program: Ten days

Cost for 2 experts:

TOTAL: \$19,000.00

Airfare (US - Port Louis - US): \$8,000.00

Hotel and Per Diem (10 days): \$5,000.00

Meeting Rooms: \$2,000.00

Miscellaneous (materials, invitations, etc) \$4,000.00

¶15. Points of Contact at Post: (i)

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BLASER